

Multimodal Composition in Teacher Education: From Consumers to Producers

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Abstract In the twenty-first century, visual texts are vital to learning in English language arts (ELA). As English educators, we know the importance of telling and sharing stories in various formats in order to build community as well as facilitate deep understanding of the concepts we teach. In our methods courses for undergraduates, two of our course projects help students think creatively and reflectively about themselves as ELA teachers, particularly in this time of changing demands, standards, and high-stakes testing. Further, these projects also help to expand students' understanding of visual and digital ELA content and promote their development as sophisticated consumers of these texts. However, the projects also encourage students to be producers of digital content and to better understand the affordances of multimodal composition. We ask students to use digital tools such as iMovie, Windows Movie Maker, and VoiceThread to achieve our goals. In this chapter, we share the multimodal assignments we use and student project examples. While we teach in a university setting, we discuss adaptations to these projects that make them applicable to learners in other contexts.

Introduction

At the University of Delaware, we recently surveyed students from groups underrepresented in teacher education to understand what might prevent them from entering the profession (Flynn et al. 2014). When asked why they were not interested in teaching, 47% of the responses from non-teacher education majors indicated they had a negative view of the profession, with approximately 4% of the respondents reporting that they believed teaching to be “boring” or “doing the same thing day after day.” While the reality of most teachers' experiences is vastly different from this perception, unfortunately teaching, teachers, and texts are often viewed as re-

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petitive, unchanging, and out of touch with a dynamic, connected, and technology-driven world. Integrating multimodal texts into the classroom is one way to combat this mistaken belief, by expanding students' and teachers' communicative palettes and bridging the divide between literacy practices that are traditionally associated with school and those that are used to communicate our ideas and desires outside of classroom walls.

In the twenty-first century, visual texts are vital to learning English language arts (ELA). The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) cites among its core principles that "the concept of literacy" must be expanded "to include all forms of media" (2007). Literacy experts point out that modern-day literacies are more likely to take place on a computer screen than on a paper page (Ranker 2007) and that in order to be successful, students must come to think of themselves not only as readers of digital texts but also as creators and designers of those texts (Dalton 2012). As the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2011) notes:

The importance of images and visual media in contemporary culture is changing what it means to be literate in the 21st century. Today's society is highly visual, and visual imagery is no longer supplemental to other forms of information. New digital technologies have made it possible for almost anyone to create and share visual media. Yet the pervasiveness of images and visual media does not necessarily mean that individuals are able to critically view, use, and produce visual content. Individuals must develop these essential skills in order to engage capably in a visually-oriented society. Visual literacy empowers individuals to participate fully in a visual culture.

It is not surprising, then, that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for ELA, the academic standards adopted in 43 of the 50 states of the USA at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, include a new focus on visual and digital texts. Using media to create and publish, utilizing technology to foster collaboration, evaluating the effectiveness of different mediums, and integrating sources from diverse formats to enhance understanding are all incorporated into the CCSS (see Writing 4.6, Reading Informational 8.7, Speaking and Listening 11–12.2, and Speaking and Listening 11–12.5; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers 2010). These standards—and the demands of our increasingly digital world—must impact teachers' instructional decision making and our responsibilities as teacher educators. For students to acquire the skills needed to engage in this digital world and share their stories and developing understandings with others, we need to include more explicit instruction in the real-world literacies that are represented by these texts (Lewis et al. 2013).

As English educators, we know the importance of telling and sharing stories in various formats in order to build community as well as facilitate deep understanding of the concepts we teach. In our methods' courses for undergraduates, two of our course projects help students think creatively and reflectively about themselves as ELA teachers, particularly in this time of changing demands, standards, and high-stakes testing. Further, these projects also help to expand students' understanding of visual and digital ELA content and promote their development as sophisticated consumers of these texts. However, the projects also encourage students to be

producers of digital content and to better understand how “modes carry meaning” (Dalton 2012). We ask students to use digital tools such as iMovie, Windows Movie Maker, and VoiceThread to achieve our goals, building on other studies that have demonstrated their effectiveness in both secondary and university settings. Researchers have discussed how adolescents successfully use digital storytelling and podcasting projects to build community, tell their own stories, and develop multimodal proficiencies (Kadger 2004; Wilson et al. 2012). Others have shown how both urban students’ and preservice teachers’ creation of digital texts fosters critical media literacy (Morrell et al. 2013; Garcia et al. 2013). Teachers need real-world examples of how they can encourage both the production and the consumption of visual texts, so in this chapter, we share the multimodal assignments we use and student project examples. While we teach in a university setting, we discuss adaptations to these projects that make them applicable to learners in middle and high school classrooms.

The Metaphorical Construct in Young Adult Literature

Bill: The Metaphorical Construct as Alternative Assessment

I was introduced to the “metaphorical construct” when I was a relatively inexperienced high school English teacher in the early 1990s, well before the technological explosion we are currently experiencing. It was attractive to me as an alternative to the reading quizzes, exams, and five-paragraph essays that I had primarily used to assess student understanding of literary texts, because the strategy pushed students to make creative connections with literature that traditional assessments suppressed. Researchers and educators have complained that instructional practices in schools often limit students’ capacity for making imaginative links, even though “the relentless drive of every human being to make connections is at the heart of the creative process” (Weaver and Prince 1990, p. 379).

The metaphorical construct strategy is loosely based on the “synectics” work of Gordon (1961) and Prince (1970), a method for group problem-solving and innovation. Literally translated as “bringing together diverse elements,” synectics encourages participants to make connections between seemingly irrelevant ideas in order to generate new ideas and creatively solve group problems (Weaver and Prince 1990). When applied to literary texts, the strategy itself is quite simple and elegant and represented in Fig. 1 below.

After reading a literary text, students identify an element of the text that they believe is important to the overall meaning of the work. This component could be the trajectory of a character’s development, the story’s setting, a repeated symbol, a textual motif, or other important aspect. Next, students “bring together diverse elements” by searching for a physical or cultural object that is metaphorically related to that text. Students deconstruct that item into its constituent parts, demonstrating

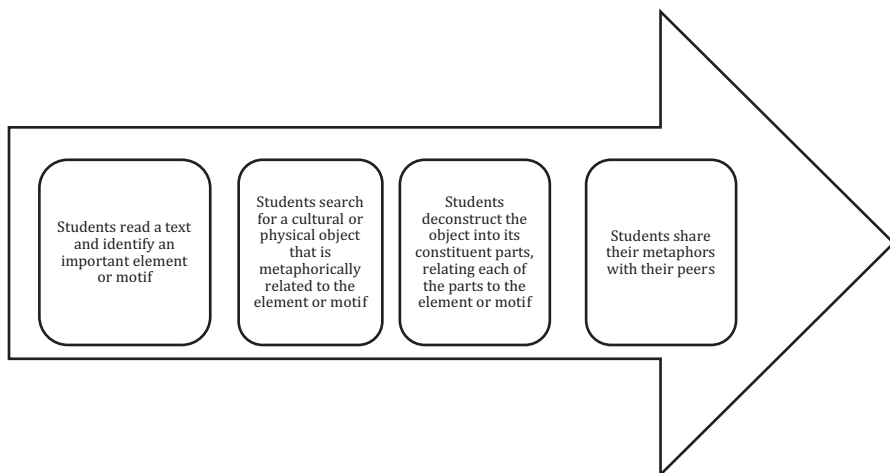


Fig. 1 Metaphorical construct process

how they relate to important thematic or structural elements of the work or the author's development of characters. Students then present their creative extended metaphor to their peers.

Take the following example in Table 1. This thoughtful metaphorical construct was created by a high school junior in response to the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut (1994). The student was fascinated with Vonnegut's time-travel motif in the novel and decided to compare that motif to a fast-food "value meal." In his sophisticated analogy, the main course became the main character's tragic experiences as a prisoner of war because of the central and destructive role his war experience played in his life. His uninspired present became the junk food French fries, and the refreshing beverage became the main character's escape into a future on the planet, Trafalmore (Table 1).

As you can imagine, this student needed to think, search, and experiment before committing to a suitable metaphorical construct that fully represented his understanding of this significant aspect of the novel. This experimentation is an important element of the strategy that encourages a type of critical and creative thinking that Weaver and Prince (1990) call "generative," a process where critical thinking guides "the mental pursuits of guesses, approximations, absurdities, hunches, feelings and intuitions" (p. 381). At first sight, it is not obvious that a fast-food value meal is a suitable analogue for the central motif of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. However, through the student's generative thinking process, he was able to build those creative and critical connections. As he deconstructed each of the elements of the meal into its constituent parts—hamburger, fries, and beverage—he developed a deeper understanding of the time-travel motif and a lasting and sophisticated understanding of how this motif is related to the main theme of the book. Instead of reading the text as merely a screwball dark comedy or a bawdy science fiction book, after engaging in the strategy he was able to understand the book as a more subtle and

Table 1 Metaphorical construct for *Slaughterhouse-Five* (Vonnegut 1994)

<i>Slaughterhouse-Five's</i> time-travel motif= fast-food value meal		
<i>Part of the metaphor</i>	<i>Part of the motif it is like</i>	<i>Connection</i>
The burger	Billy Pilgrim's experience as a prisoner of war during WWII (that he keeps time traveling to)	...Because this is the "meat" of the book. Kurt Vonnegut is arguing that war is brutal and dehumanizing and permanently impacts the lives of those who are involved. Billy's safe but quietly desperate present life, and his escapes to Trafalmdore are caused by his "meaty" wartime experiences
French fries	Billy Pilgrim's present life	...Because Billy Pilgrim's current life is "junk food" just like fries. He is in a job that he does not like, and in a marriage with a woman whom he does not love
Large beverage	Billy Pilgrim's time travel into the future as a prisoner in Trafalmdore	...Because like a cooling beverage after salty fries, Billy Pilgrim's imprisonment on a future Trafalmdore is an escape from the pain of war and the meaninglessness of his current life

sophisticated statement about the psychological and emotional impact of war on individuals and society.

It is important to understand that students did not produce sophisticated metaphorical constructs such as this when I first utilized this strategy. Students often had difficulty committing to a single symbol, motif, or character that would be suitable for this kind of deep exploration. Other times, students either had difficulty choosing a suitable cultural object related to their novel or were challenged by the task of breaking down that object into its analogically related parts. Therefore, as I continued to develop this project, I needed to make some essential modifications to focus students on important textual elements in the project, to provide practice in analogical/metaphorical thinking, and to more effectively support the planning and writing process.

The first modification was to simply introduce the metaphorical construct assignment even before we began reading the novel. This not only provided students with a more explicit purpose for their reading but also allowed me to review authors' use of symbols, motifs, and character growth, encouraging students to generate multiple examples of each from books they had already read in preparation for their reading. The second modification was to add explicit instruction in constructing extended metaphors. Students generated extended metaphors for abstract concepts such as "love," "schooling," "disappointment," etc., choosing physical objects to which these concepts were related, breaking those objects into its parts, and relating each of the parts to elements of the concept. Applying this practice to the novel, I asked them to identify the most important element of key sections in their reading logs and to generate a metaphor as a "pass out of class" summary strategy for that day's work. These metaphors would serve as discussion starters for the next day's

class. The third important modification was to add a collaborative planning and writing element to the project. My students had a great deal of difficulty generating ideas for their analogy on their own. However, they were much more successful when they worked with peers as they experimented with ideas. Research demonstrates that collaborative approaches to composition lead to higher-quality products (Graham and Perin 2007), and can serve to build relationships within the classroom (Nolen 2007). Through collaboration and explicit practice with analogical thinking, students were much more successful with this project.

The Metaphorical Construct and Digital Tools

When I began instructing preservice teachers in the university setting in a young adult literature and multimedia text course, I began to think more seriously about how my preservice teachers could combine digital and visual storytelling with the “creative connecting” that is a part of the metaphorical construct assessment. Digital tools provide an opportunity for students to not only read but also practice composing multimedia texts, and to efficiently share their work with their peers. A digital version of this assessment provides a clear connection to the CCSS Writing Anchors, which require students to use technology to “produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others” and to compose texts that “examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers 2010). Additionally, multimodal composition provides a framework for reinforcing the communicative and social function of writing that is so important to student motivation (Boscolo and Gelati 2013). Instead of framing composition as a solitary endeavor that is only seen by the student and teacher (Boscolo and Gelati 2013), digital tools provide an interactive context and literate community of practice where composition can be widely shared and new composing skills developed.

Instructing Modes and Meaning

The first step to changing to a digital version of the metaphorical construct was to broaden students’ communicative palettes and to teach them how different modes such as images, video, written and spoken words, and music can be combined for a unified effect. As we said in the introduction, “modes carry meaning,” and a specific attention to these modes was needed to be successful. Karchmer-Klein (2013) asserts that picture books and other early literacy material combine images and words in ways that effectively convey meaning, and young children are encouraged to look for visual cues in images when they do not understand a text’s words. However, she also points out that as students move through their educational careers, focus shifts from looking at both visuals and words to a words-only focus. I wanted

to broaden our students' perspective and to bring back these other modes into our students' composition processes.

Although the picture book example above is merely an illustration of the shift toward print as students move through the grades, we would suggest that a good starting point for preparing students for the digital metaphorical construct is by reintroducing them to high-quality picture books, as well as other print and digital media that integrate various compositional modes. We began using these texts as the assignment evolved to help our students analyze and discuss the ways that multimodal composers combine modes to develop a unified effect, after previous students struggled to combine images, text, narration, and sound to effectively convey their meaning. This approach not only targets the Common Core State Reading Anchor 7 related to integrating and evaluating "content presented in diverse formats and media" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers 2010) but also serves as additional practice and scaffolding for close reading, where students must evaluate how authorial choices directly support meaning and create effect, the focus of Common Core Reading Anchor 4. We also believe that this is a perfect opportunity to introduce students to *ineffective* examples of multimodal composition, where the combination of modes fails to effectively communicate a unified message. This addresses NAMLE's core principle that media literacy education "requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create" (NAMLE 2007). For this project we downloaded effective viral brand videos (short videos created to sell a product), as well as those that we considered less effective. Students viewed the videos, analyzed them in collaborative groups for their use of images, music, and print text, and evaluated them as to whether they communicated—or failed to communicate—a clear brand message.

After viewing and evaluating others' multimodal compositions, students need to be introduced to the digital tools that they can use to communicate their metaphor and their understanding of the text to others. As discussed in our introduction, we asked students to use iMovie, Windows Movie Maker, and VoiceThread to create these digital products. Some students have previous experience with these tools, and they are fairly simple to use as well as free or low cost (see in Table 3 for more information). We provided students time to practice with these tools and supported them in their use. Further, a small number of tools allowed us to more effectively introduce the tools and to guide and evaluate the final product. However, as Karchmer-Klein (2013) suggests, if digital storytelling is going to be integrated into classroom instruction—particularly if it is to be used with younger children—more structured tools can also be helpful. Storytelling applications are widely available to support digital composition. These apps scaffold students' use of compositional modes, and provide structure for their compositions using a basic story grammar.

In sum, we have come to believe through several iterations of this project and the instruction that scaffolded it that if students are to produce effective digital metaphorical constructs, they must have explicit instruction and practice in three distinct areas that are represented in Fig. 2. First, students need to understand the metaphorical construct assessment and its goals. For students with a more literal bent, this

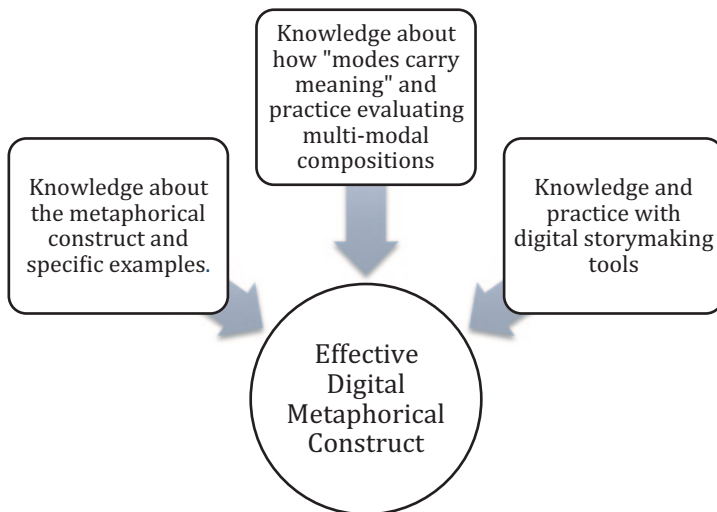


Fig. 2 Knowledge needed to build a metaphorical construct

understanding can be challenging! This phase of instruction includes introducing students to the concept and working through several exemplary illustrations of successful constructs. We would also suggest that teachers arrange for collaborative practice with their students by identifying characters or motifs from previously read works and provide opportunities for small groups of students to engage in the creative and generative thinking (Weaver and Prince 1990) needed to build suitable constructs.

The second type of knowledge students need is knowledge about the tools of multimodal composition. Therefore, teachers will have to instruct students in how to use audio, video, print, and images to achieve a unified effect and to provide students with practice analyzing and evaluating effective and ineffective examples. The third type of knowledge is that of the digital compositional tools themselves. Although as university instructors we are more comfortable with allowing students a broader palette of tools, we would suggest that teachers of high school, middle school, and elementary students utilize one specific tool, and provide instruction and practice with its features before utilizing it in the context of the metaphorical construct. Focusing on a single tool will help students to master that tool, and provide a single platform for collaboration and sharing of the digital products.

An Example of a Digital Metaphorical Construct

In order to illustrate a digital metaphorical construct, we would like to describe a project that was created by one of our secondary ELA teacher candidates. Rachel (all students gave their permission for their first names to be cited in our chapter)

chose one of our course texts, the award winning young adult novel *Looking for Alaska* (Green 2005), and decided to focus on the emotional growth of the main character and narrator, Pudge. Besides being one of the most significant aspects of this work of fiction, Rachel's focus also meets CCSS Reading Anchor 3, which holds students accountable for analyzing "how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers 2010).

Rachel's first step after deciding on this textual focus was to think about, search for, and experiment with physical or cultural objects that could become suitable analogues for Pudge's growth as a character across the course of the novel. Walking into her kitchen one day to grab a snack, Rachel noticed a number of bananas on her counter that had quickly turned overripe in a matter of a few days. Although not obviously connected at first, our student was able to bring together the "diverse elements" (Weaver and Prince 1990) of banana and character growth in a metaphor represented in Table 2. We warn you that this metaphor contains a "spoiler" for those who have not yet read the novel!

Although this is a wonderful metaphor that makes creative connections between two seemingly unrelated elements, developing the metaphor is not enough. Rachel then had to take the role of multimedia designer (Dalton 2012) in order to share her sophisticated understanding with others. In the case of this assignment, Rachel took a direct approach, using a narrated PowerPoint, with multiple images of bananas at each stage of ripeness, excerpts from the novel, various typographic elements, and a recorded audio narration in a five-slide framework (introduction slide and four slides dedicated to the stages of development).

However, because of students' overreliance on PowerPoint, in more recent years we have pushed our students to branch out to use more sophisticated and powerful tools. Our student could just as easily have used iMovie with Ken Burns-style graphics of slowly moving bananas, print text, small snippets of video from YouTube, and Harry Belafonte's "Banana Boat" song playing in the background. Similarly, she could have created a Glogster EDU post that provides a digital framework for combining a multimodal mix of video, pictures, text, audio, attached data files, and hyperlinks in a creative and interactive digital poster (Lewis et al. 2013).

One of the challenges that instructors face when assigning students digital projects is that students might seek to overuse some of the features of these tools, experimenting with the "bells and whistles" but failing to achieve a unified effect (Karchmer-Klein 2013). That is why it is imperative for teachers to play a guiding role in this design process. Just as we would suggest using a graphic organizer, like you see in Table 2, for the construction of the metaphors themselves, we would also suggest that teachers push students to create a "storyboard" for their metaphorical construct before moving to the digital tool itself. In this way, students can sketch out the flow of their ideas, decide what multimodal elements they will be using, and where they will be used, while providing the teacher and their peers with a clear understanding of both the direction of the metaphorical construct and the multimodal composition that communicates it.

Table 2 Metaphorical construct for *Looking for Alaska* (Green 2005)

Pudge's growth as a character in <i>Looking For Alaska</i> = life cycle of a banana		
<i>Part of the metaphor</i>	<i>Part of character development it is like</i>	<i>Connection</i>
The green, unripe banana in its bunch	Pudge's naïve life before going to boarding school	...Because Pudge is "green," part of a bunch of dull, flavorless friends, but full of untapped potential
The bright yellow, ripe banana	Pudge's life after making friends with Alaska, the Colonel, and Takumi at boarding school	...Because in this section of the novel, Pudge breaks away from the "bunch" of his family and friends at home, ripening to the possibilities of his new life and new friends, experimenting, and rebelling. He is finding his "great perhaps"
The overripe banana	Pudge's life immediately after the sudden death of his friend, Alaska	...Because like bananas that quickly turn from ripe and delicious to overripe, soft, and sickening, Pudge's life also quickly goes downhill after the sudden loss of his friend. He is devastated and feels dead inside
The frozen overripe banana	Pudge's mourning period	Just like overripe bananas can be stored in the freezer, the period after Alaska's death is like this frozen storage period. Pudge is frozen with guilt over Alaska's death, and in a self-imposed deep freeze in his friendships. He is also frozen in that he cannot stop searching for the reason for Alaska's death
The banana bread ingredient	Pudge's coming to terms with the death	Because like a thawed frozen banana, Pudge has shed his "peel" of guilt, loss, and bitterness that has separated himself from his friends, and transformed himself into something beautiful and complex like banana bread. He also appreciates the complexity of this new state and understands that life is about change and loss, just like the bread changes bananas into a tasty treat

In William Calvin's *The Cerebral Code* (1996), he highlights the importance of metaphor to human understanding when he writes:

If we are to have meaningful, connected experiences; ones that we can comprehend and reason about; we must be able to discern patterns to our actions, perceptions, and conceptions. Underlying our vast network of interrelated literal meanings (all of those words about objects and actions) are those imaginative structures of understanding such as schema and metaphor, such as the mental imagery that allows us to extrapolate a path, or zoom in on one part of the whole, or zoom out until the trees merge into a forest (1996, p. 159–160).

We agree. By using the imaginative structures of metaphor, we believe that like Calvin (1996), we can teach our students to discern patterns, and to develop the mental flexibility and creativity to "zoom in" on the important elements of a text and their world and then "zoom out" to reflect on the whole and what the text means to their lives. It helps students to extrapolate a path through a text and to develop long lasting connections to its most salient elements.

Digital Stories About Identity and Teaching

Jill: Students Telling Their Own Stories

Bill's metaphorical construct project provides an example of how students can use digital tools to understand stories. In his case, future ELA teachers use the project to analyze a young adult novel, but the assignment could easily be adapted to different ages and texts. In another course required for our future ELA teachers, Literacy and Technology, students utilize digital tools to tell their own stories. In the course, students create a multimodal narrative in which they consider how their backgrounds impact their beliefs about teaching and learning English and how their worldviews influence their future work with adolescents. Students address one or more of the following questions:

- How and when did you know you wanted to be a teacher (of English)?
- What experiences have you had working with adolescents, and how have those experiences influenced you?
- What is your own background (defined in whatever ways you choose: race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, gender, region, etc.) and how do those parts of your identity affect how you see the world?
- What and who has influenced your life thus far?
- What is your philosophy of teaching?

Students begin work on this project by brainstorming about the story they want to tell, using the website bubbl.us, another mind-mapping tool of their choice, or pencil and paper. They start to focus on the question or questions they want to address, taking notes on their responses, and begin to list potentially related audio and visual content. After reading about narrative elements—exposition, flow, scripting, images—and production elements—shots and narration—students then move to developing a storyboard; many excellent digital storytelling resources, including storyboards, are accessible on the web, including those collected on educator Kathy Schrock's website (Schrock 2014). As they do in Bill's class, students explore both good and bad examples of the use of visual and audio elements in texts, in this case examining the digital poetry found in the Electronic Literature Collection (2011). In preparation for a class meeting in our campus' Student Multimedia Design Center, students then write a script outline and bring with them at minimum three to five images, one audio clip or song, one video clip, and a completed storyboard. Throughout this time, students practice using both iMovie and VoiceThread during short assignments in class to activate their knowledge of these tools.

On the final product, students are assessed on the story's focus and substance, pacing, visual elements, and audio content (voice and/or sounds/music). The project addresses the National Council of Teachers of English's (2012) standard 2.1 for teacher education programs: "Candidates can compose a range of formal and informal texts taking into consideration the interrelationships among form, audience, context, and purpose; candidates understand that writing is a recursive process; can-

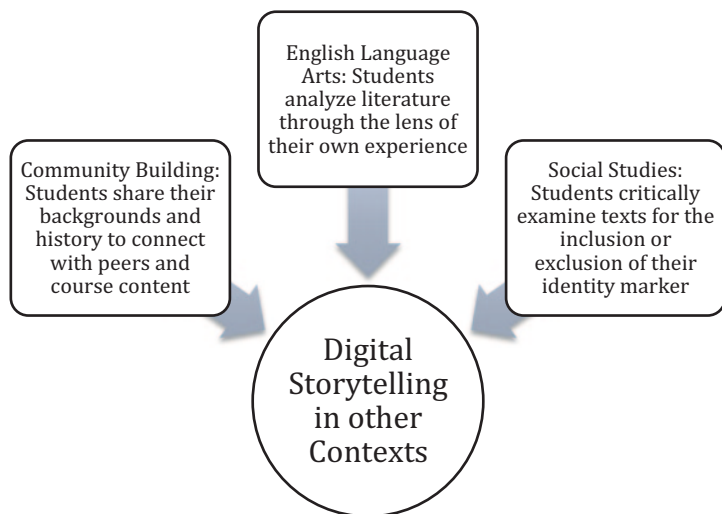


Fig. 3 How digital storytelling can be used in multiple contexts

didates can use contemporary technologies and/or digital media to compose multi-modal discourse.”

Building on the skills developed in the metaphorical construct assignment, students in the course answer the questions using multiple modes. This past fall, the majority of students used photos (both Creative Commons-licensed pictures and their own photographs), music, voice-over narration, and title/section slides to create an organized final product that merged words, images, and sounds to convey meaning. Since this course was a new offering in 2013, I am looking forward to building up more examples of student work to share with the class as models, as not all of the digital stories did successfully achieve visual media literacy goals. However, the sharing of projects during class time helps students connect with one another to strengthen their cohort of learners. At the end of the semester, many students identified this project and our viewing of each other’s work as one of the things they enjoyed most in the class.

While this assignment is focused on future teachers, these questions could easily be adapted to other contexts, which are represented in Fig. 3. For instance, digital storytelling can allow students of any age to share information about their backgrounds in a community-building activity. In order to grapple with challenging intellectual issues, teachers and students must first develop a productive and positive classroom environment. As Christensen (2000) notes:

building community begins when students get inside the lives of others in history, literature, or down the hallways, but students also learn by exploring their own lives and coming to terms with the people they are “doing time” with in the classroom (p. 6).

She goes on to say that “the key to reaching my students and building community” is “helping students excavate and reflect on their personal experiences, and connecting

them to the world of language, literature, and society” (2000, p. 9). Along with using a digital story project to explore identity and connect with their peers, students in an English class might construct a digital story to analyze a text using the reader response lens (Appleman 2009), explaining which aspects of their identities influenced their understanding of a text. In social studies, students might examine how aspects of their culture, race, gender, sexuality, or other identity markers are or are not represented fully in the sources they study. NAMLE (2007) “affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages,” and unpacking these meanings is important. Such adaptations would combine the analysis of texts that we have previously discussed and the incorporation of students’ backgrounds to facilitate deeper understanding.

In our course Literacy and Technology, students also study popular culture representations of teachers in films and TV shows. In their analysis, they find that many films and television shows paint, at best, an incomplete picture of teaching and learning. In some cases, media representations of teachers are overwhelmingly negative. The digital story project enables future teachers to use their own compositions to “talk back” to such portrayals of teaching and of school. In her story, Michele revealed that many people have discouraged her and her peers from entering the profession, but she was excited to prove them wrong. Sam proudly claimed that “Teachers are influential and their position should be respected,” despite the fact that “our society doesn’t value teachers enough.” Many projects extolled a positive, student-centered approach to education. Alli remarked, “I want to support my ‘family’ of students the way my family has me.” Emily noted, “My students are capable of anything,” and expressed excitement that “there are so many ways to connect with students.” Jill was eager to develop a “diverse and inclusive classroom.” Both Sara and Mark pointed out that they expect to learn from their students just as the students will learn from them. While our students are future English teachers, responding to media representations of any group—whether it be a profession, gender, sexuality, race, generation—and complicating what could be an overly simplified portrayal encourages students to be critical consumers of the media around them (Beach 2007; Flynn 2014). As NAMLE notes in its articulation of core principles, “media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization” (NAMLE 2007). Through projects such as this, students of any age are empowered to become the “visually literate individual” promoted by the ACRL (2011), who is “both a critical consumer of visual media and a competent contributor to a body of shared knowledge and culture.” While many students naturally took this opportunity to talk back to negative or incomplete portrayals of teachers in the media, in the future I plan to directly invite students to do so, sharing with them the ACRL goals and NAMLE core principles.

The digital story project also helps students critically examine their “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie 1975). Many preservice teachers have had positive experiences in school and therefore ultimately replicate practices that perpetuate the status quo, which can be problematic. In response, teacher educators often “seek to confront the apprenticeship of observation and to stimulate reflection on teaching and learning through the use of autobiography” (Hammerness et al. 2005, p. 434).

The majority of students in my class did indeed talk about teachers who have positively impacted them and inspired them to teach, but some students also shared more negative school experiences that they or others have had, enabling them to take a more critical stance. Kaitlin discussed how the education system failed her family. Her parents' success in life, despite their difficulties in school, led Kaitlin to notice "the disconnect" between her enriching educational experience and that of her "disadvantaged peers." Laura discussed her social struggles in school and noted how her own difficulty motivated her to teach in high-needs areas. Veronica told about her work with homeless youth, which opened her eyes to issues of poverty, addiction, and abuse that she knew she would see play out in her secondary teaching. Hannah explained that though she was a successful student, she became increasingly "unsatisfied with the system." George inserted text in his story that read, "This slide represents the 18 years I spent in the closet. It's my goal to make sure no student feels like he/she/ze has to hide like I did." Finally, Garrett, who identifies outside the gender binary, talked about how ze wants to make sure zir "classroom is a space where students feel safe and included, because I know learning can be difficult when you're on the fringe" ("ze" and "zir" are pronouns used by those who identify outside of the gender categories of male and female). By thinking critically about schools and classrooms, students therefore use this project to "be both critical thinkers and creative producers of an increasingly wide range of messages using image, language, and sound," as the NAMLE (2014) advocates.

Digital Tools and Media Literacy

Multimodal composition can be a powerful way for students to understand and tell stories. In this chapter, we have described our assignments, provided examples of our students' work, and discussed how these projects might be adapted to other contexts. Just as our students learn through analyzing and telling stories, in writing this chapter, we developed new links between our courses and learned about ways that will make stronger connections between these projects. For instance, by identifying both the skills and digital tools that students need to be successful with both projects, we began to think more strategically about how and when we teach and reinforce these digital composition skills in our two courses. Furthermore, writing together pushed us to think how multimodal composition can be made a part of other program assessments, and how we can effectively build more of these digital composition skills across the trajectory of their teacher preparation program.

Another challenge for us, as it is for all educators, is staying abreast of and competent in new technology tools that can help meet our goals. Teachers sometimes fear using technology because they do not consider themselves experts. However, we cannot allow the ever-emerging field to intimidate us. Jill learned tools like VoiceThread and iMovie along with our students, and together we were able to solve problems that arose. NAMLE's core principle three articulates that effective media literacy education "builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages" and explains

that, as with “print literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive, and repeated practice” (NAMLE 2007). The projects that our students complete do not make them or us, their teachers, experts in multimodal composing, but are nevertheless valuable in building digital composition proficiency and visualizing learning.

NAMLE (2014) defines media literacy as:

A series of communication competencies, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information in a variety of forms, including print and non-print messages. Media literacy empowers people to be both critical thinkers and creative producers of an increasingly wide range of messages using image, language, and sound. It is the skillful application of literacy skills to media and technology messages. (NAMLE 2007)

We believe that our course projects enable students to skillfully consume, assess, and create both traditional and multimodal texts. However, in order to develop these digital competencies, part of our jobs as teachers and teacher educators is to provide multiple opportunities for digital composition, and to explicitly teach the skills that students need to compose in multiple modes toward a unified effect. Even though substantive interactions with texts and wrestling with developing identities as adult professionals is difficult for students, we believe that digital tools are an effective scaffold and conduit through which students can share their creativity and analysis with others. These projects also serve as an effective catalyst for conversation, debate, and, ultimately, understanding.

Glossary

Table 3 A list of digital tools for multimodal composition

Tool	Description/purpose	Cost
Bubbl.us	An online brainstorming tool that allows students and teachers to create colorful mind maps to print or share electronically with others	Free for up to 3 maps variable pricing for multiple licenses
Glogster EDU	An online tool for creating multimedia posters that utilize text, audio, video, images, and graphics	Variable pricing for different types of subscription
iMovie	Movie making application that allows users to create HD movies using video, text, graphics, sound, and music	Free to those who have Mac hardware
VoiceThread	An interactive, multimedia slideshow tool which allows users to create and share presentations, and allows viewers to add their own audio, text, or video commentary	Free for limited number of individual subscriptions
Windows Movie Maker	A video creation and editing tool that allows students to create movies using video, text, graphics, sound, and music	Free

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